Endgame?

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"Invention in topology for clinical practice"

1 Introduction

What I would like to propose to you stems from an encounter between two texts.
The first is a passage you are no doubt familiar with, in which Freud compares analysis to the game of chess:

> *Anyone who wants to learn the noble game of chess from books will soon discover that only the openings and final moves can be presented systematically and exhaustively, while the immeasurable variety of moves that follow the opening defies such a presentation.*

The second is taken from Marc Darmon's article "Serre moi fort" ("Hold me tight") in the issue of the Lacanian journal devoted to the clinical implications of the Borromean knot:

> *The Borromean knot is generally represented flattened, reduced to a minimal number of crossings. But we can hypothesize that this knot is generally very tangled and that analysis will gradually reduce the additional crossings until it encounters the irreducible crossings of the structure.*
> *In topology, there are three basic movements, which are Reidemeister operations... Perhaps we should consider these three basic Reidemeister movements as the elementary grammar of the knot, its rules of writing? They must take into account both the laws of the signifier: Entstellung, Verdichtung, Verschiebung, transposition, slippage of the signified under the signifier, condensation, displacement, and the rules of interpretation, which are the same, except that the knot takes into account the dimension of the Real in each movement.*

It seemed to me that Marc Darmon's hypothesis opened up a field of investigation that was worth exploring: If, in therapy, there is a phase that leads to a simple, minimal knot through a gradual unraveling consisting of a series of operations equivalent to Reidemeister moves, it would be interesting to examine the configurations of the Borromean knot that are located at a distance **of one** Reidemeister move from the simple knot. If we were able to list and interpret these configurations, they would eventually give us access to an explanation of this elementary grammar of the knot in clinical terms.

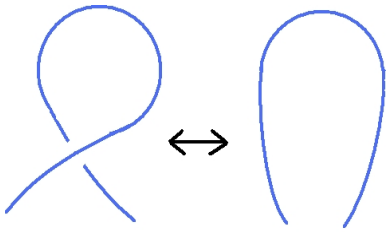
However, this is an ideal goal, and what I will be able to deliver to you will fall far short of this ideal, for several reasons that I will also attempt to explain.

I would like to emphasize that I have entitled my remarks "endgame" in reference to Freud's comparison. This in no way implies that obtaining a simplified, purified knot can in any way represent the end of a cure. In my view, it is a necessary step, but probably not a sufficient one, whose importance and meaning in a particular treatment can only be assessed after the fact.

2 The three basic movements

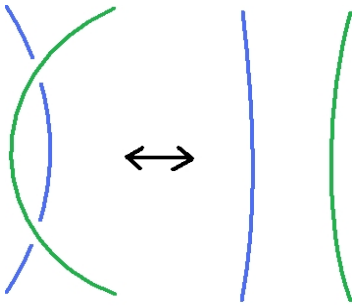
What Reidemeister demonstrated is that the three moves he defined are sufficient in all cases to traverse all possible configurations of a knot or braid. They are therefore sufficient

to reach the minimal configuration of a knot. Let us recall what these three movements are:
There is Omega 1, the one-cord movement:



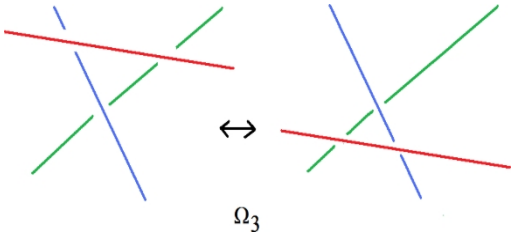
Ω_1

There is Omega 2, the two-rope move:



Ω 2

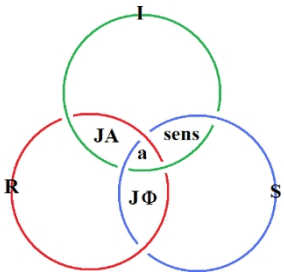
There is Omega 3, the three-string movement:



Ω_3

When we try to apply one of these three movements to the Borromean knot, the first thing we notice is the abundance of possibilities: there are clearly a relatively large number of different ways to apply these movements to the knot, even if we limit ourselves to a single application, since we have imposed this constraint on ourselves: to remain **within one** Reidemeister move of the simple knot.
While these moves may constitute a kind of basic alphabet for our practice, they are clearly very varied, even though their number is finite. We have not attempted to count them exactly, but there must be around fifty.

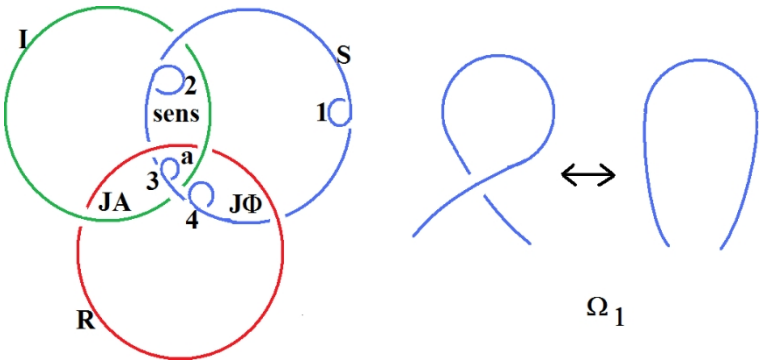
We will limit ourselves here to providing an "experimental" sampling of the effect of these moves. We will always start from the same "final" configuration of the knot: R overcomes S, which overcomes I, Levogyre, because this is the form most often presented by Lacan.



3 Omega 1 (the loop)

If we consider a simple Borromean knot and ask ourselves about the different ways of performing an Omega 1 type movement, we must first identify a few obvious points:
This movement can be applied to any of the three circles R, S, or I.
This movement can be applied to a given circle, to one of the four segments of that circle, delimited by the above-below crossing points.
This movement can be applied in two ways, inside or outside the circle in question, giving 24 possibilities.

The following figure illustrates four of these possibilities, among the eight that concern the symbolic circle.



The Omega 1 movement concerns the conjunction of two signifiers considered in their purely symbolic aspect. The symbolic circle closes in on itself, obscuring itself and delimiting—from our point of view—an area that is, in a sense, colonized by the symbolic. It goes without saying that this closure will not have the same effects depending on the sector of the symbolic that it affects.

Let us propose an interpretation of what we might understand from these various loops:

In 1, we have a conjunction of two signifiers that we could call "simple," in that no consequences arise a priori for the subject. These are simply coincidences that form "the crystal of language," which means that in French, "d'eux" and "deux," "vœu" and
"wants" are homophones, or that "stone" and "ivy" differ by only one letter, etc.

In 2, it is an effect of meaning. Two signifiers come together, and the resulting loop colonizes the area of meaning identified by Lacan, i.e., the imaginary as well as the symbolic. Can we not see here the effect of a stamping, as we find in the witty remark

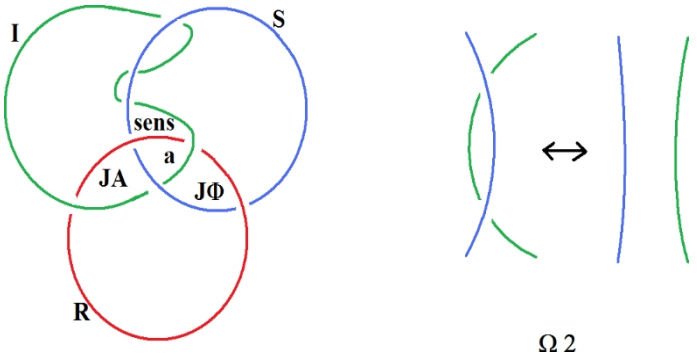
"familionnaire," for example?

In 3, it is the area pinned down by Lacan that is colonized by the encounter of two signifiers. We would gladly see here not the witticism, but the slip of the tongue, a disturbing substitution that touches us most closely, by surprise, capturing a part of our desire.

Finally, in 4, the signifying conjunction carves out its share of phallic jouissance. It seems to me that the jubilant effects produced by certain utterances, such as Jarry's famous "merdre" or Tardieu's "Ciel mon zébu," could be attributed to this occurrence.

4 Omega 2 (the crossover)

Here is an example of an Omega 2 movement:



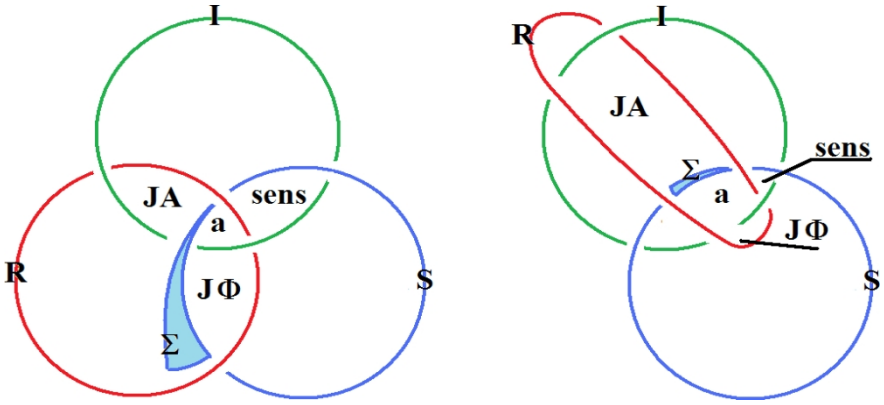
Ω 2

In two "additional" points, the circle of the symbolic overcomes that of the imaginary. Two meanings are fixed, the shift of the signified under the signifier is stopped, and the result is a hiatus in the area of meaning pinned down by Lacan. Meaning is no longer organized into a connected component but into two separate components. The Omega 2 movement, by bringing about the coalescence (condensation?) of these two signifiers, will restore the connected configuration to the domain of meaning, giving it back its character as a "point" in the space structured by the knot, insofar as a "point" is something that can be stuck. The structural crossing point will now be the third, the only one that matters in this case, inaccessible before the operation. From 3, we move to 1.

Example: For years, a patient has regularly made a slip of the tongue, confusing his sister's first name with that of his wife. That's just how it is, he mentions it from time to time, without drawing any conclusions from it. Until one day, while reflecting on his relationship with women, he realizes that his relationship with his sister and his wife is actually linked to his mother and the special relationship he had with her. A new phase of therapy then begins, in which he is able to rethink his own place in his mother's desire and gradually begins to question his father's place in his constellation as well.

5 Omega 3 (crossing a junction)

Here, the Node has a surprise in store for us: starting from the simple Borromean knot, we see that no Omega 3 movement is possible directly. This is because in the usual flattening of the knot, each of the eight domains is bordered by the three consistencies organized in a triskelion. The configuration of the Borromean knot is such that in order to perform an Omega 3 movement, it is essential to first perform an Omega 2 movement. This is illustrated in the following figure:



The circle of reality has been moved (rotated from left to right) so that the tightening point corresponding to phallic jouissance has been removed. To do this, an Omega 2 movement was performed, followed by an Omega 3 movement. As a result, the JΦ field can no longer be jammed. It is reduced to a simple I-R entanglement.

What is the result?

We observe that the field of Other Enjoyment, like the field pinned ***down*** by Lacan**,** are no longer delimited by a triskelion (i.e., they can be pinned down), but rather by a quadrangle, one side of which (the real on the left) can circulate freely. JA and a are therefore capable, without anything limiting them, of covering the entire field of the imaginary, with the exception of the field of meaning, which remains intact in this operation.

We found this configuration particularly interesting in that it illustrates, in our view, a number of propositions put forward by Jean-Luc Cacciali in his article in Revue Lacanienne No. 6 on anorexia-bulimia.

Thus: "*The imaginary of the body is thus detached from the symbolic dimension since, in its attempt* not *to be* entirely *phallic, the phallic function is rejected*" can be read in the figure in the disappearance of the field of phallic jouissance on the one hand, and in the free sliding of the symbolic onto the imaginary circle on the other.

We can also see in the figure how

"*In this process, she thus succeeds in dissociating the three consistencies of language, as in psychosis, but without being psychotic, because the three consistencies are not unraveled.* The figure illustrates how we can understand that dissociating is not the same as unraveling: the free play of the real overcoming the circle of the imaginary allows us to present what Charles Melman refers to as addiction to the real. The absence of a symbolic circle on the side of what remains of phallic jouissance seems to us to account for the impossibility of an inscription that sets limits. Finally, the figure reflects the fact that the symptom—in the analytical sense, that is, what emerges from the symbolic into the real—is completely absent here, except on the side of other jouissance. There is no real symptom in addiction.

6 Remarks

First remark:

We discussed Reidemeister moves, then moved on to the configurations resulting from one of these moves on the node. We then focused on making sense of some of these configurations. Of course, we still need to examine the act, or event, corresponding to the reverse move, the one that goes towards the simple node. Ideally, this could lead to a preliminary classification of the types of events that can occur in a cure, but also in the subject's life.

Second remark:
We encountered real difficulty in developing these readings of the abstract configurations provided by the node. It was as if there was a resistance that seemed symptomatic of trying to allow ourselves to be fooled by the node. At every moment, we had the impression that we were inventing something arbitrary, bordering on the forced, and that it was nothing more than a figment of our own imagination. The risk of being wrong, or even of saying anything at all, is impossible to avoid in this practice. If we nevertheless wanted to try it, it was because it seemed to us that this resistance was nothing more than an effect of our own entanglement in the knot. In wanting to let ourselves be guided by the structure, we inevitably come up against our own insertion into it, with the corollary that somewhere along the line, a feeling of "something's not right" will arise.

Third observation:
In this work, we decided to practice "symbolic optimism," that is, to start from the topological structure of the knot—abstract, incomprehensible—and move toward the clinical by asking ourselves each time: what could this possibly mean—not say—but present? To paraphrase Thom, it was a matter of putting imaginary fat on the skeleton of the structure. The question that arose at every moment was indeed: "Do we have the right to proceed in this way?" Isn't this using the Borromean knot in the wrong way, as if it were a model? But doesn't Lacan say that the knot is not a model? It seemed to us that this statement left room for an exploration that was at least valid for the structure itself: whatever reading we make of the omega 1s, for example, it is indisputable that there are only eight ways to place them. Other constraints obviously remain to be explored.

Fourth remark:
It is very clear that any explanations we can give based on figures will never be as convincing as what each person can experience with their own hands on a real knot. This is a reality that echoes what Freud repeatedly pointed out, namely the difficulty he found in conveying in writing the power of conviction that emanates from a cure. Lacan advises us to think with our hands, and we can attest to the fact that this is sound advice when it comes to knots.

7 Conclusion

I hope I have been able to illustrate, through these various variations on the knot, how unraveling this fascinating object left to us by Lacan could lead to surprises, that is, to what Theodore Reik (in "The Surprised Psychologist") refers to as *a reunion with what is most familiar to us*.
And also that the Borromean knot functions in any case as an effective algorithm for making us produce speech: it is to make you talk better, my child. And it is Lacan's genius to have left us a tool that leaves us no possibility of deluding ourselves about the nature of this speech: it is obviously a matter of constructions. Like the constructions in analysis, which Charles Melman reminds us *"never catch anything but the carp of lies with the lures of truth."*